

54. Vaisnava aparadha – part 1

Causes for vaisnava aparadhas

The question is how *vaisnava aparadhas* (offences against devotees) can originate. There are several causes, for example judging devotees by material standards, feeling envious of them or finding faults with them. But the main cause is *asat-sanga*, undesired association with other persons, because in the association of materialists we lose *bhakti*.

Asat sanga can be subdivided into two classes:

1. Portentous association with women that is contrary to the vedic tradition. This means to associate with women other than one's wife, outside of a Vedic marriage, just to satisfy one's senses, or simply to desire sensual association. (The same principle applies, of course, to women who have association with lusty men.) Another undesirable habit is to keep company with husbands who are dominated by the strong sensual desires of their wives.
2. With four kinds of non-devotees:
 - a. *Mayavadis* who believe that the Lord and the living entity are temporary and that the Lord's transcendental Deity form is material, and who think that in the end all is one;
 - b. Hypocrites who pretend to be devotees in order to make a living;
 - c. People who just hanker after sense enjoyment and have an envious, quarrelsome character; and
 - d. Atheists who do not believe in any form of God.

These two types of *asat sanga* are the cause for criticizing devotees. One should even avoid the association of those who criticize devotees for not wanting to keep company of non-devotees!

But what about devotees living outside of a temple community? Don't they keep almost exclusively the company of non-devotees. The scriptures are practical, not fanatical. They discuss three ways of association.

1. To give association,
2. To take association, and
3. To have social dealings.

If one happens to be in a situation where he cannot give association – that is, talk about Krsna conscious subjects – he can externally behave normally according to social customs and inwardly keeps one's spiritual vision. However, one should avoid to “take” association, that is, to allow to become influenced by non-devotee values, etc.

Our appreciation for the devotees will decrease by undesirable association (*asat sanga*) so that sometime or other we may commit offences. And these offenses can completely destroy our *bhakti*. Let us therefore seriously endeavor to avoid criticizing others. To do so, we have to learn to become tolerant and also to grant everybody what we claim for ourselves: namely to be accepted as we are.

(Extract from the Nectarean Ocean of the Holy name...)

Discovery:

1. How does *vaisnava aparadha* originate?
2. What are the different kinds of *asat sanga*
3. Are scriptures fanatical while discussing about association?

Understanding:

1. Discuss the main cause of *vaisnava aparadha*.
2. Which kind of association should devotees avoid?

3. Why *asat sanga* is not desirable?
4. How can we avoid criticizing others?

Application

1. Now that you have understood about *asat sanga*, share some instances where *asat sanga* has affected your relationship with the devotees.
2. How did your association with non-devotees affect your performance of devotional service? How did you get over the situation?

SRI NAMAMRITA

One should neither engage in, nor hear, blasphemy of devotees:

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī Prabhu has quoted many passages from authentic scriptures and has ably supported the statements in the matter of offenses at the feet of the holy name.... Quoting from the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, Śrī Gosvāmīji says that one should neither blaspheme the devotee of the Lord nor indulge in hearing others who are engaged in belittling a devotee of the Lord.
(SB 2.1.11)

PREACHING IS THE ESSENCE

A preacher must distinguish between devotees and nondevotees:

Unless one is a first-class devotee, he cannot be a preacher. A preacher is generally a topmost devotee, but in order to meet the general populace, he has to come to distinguish between devotees and nondevotees. Otherwise, an advanced devotee makes no such distinctions. Indeed, he always sees everyone engaged in the service of the Lord. When one engages in preaching work, he must distinguish between people and understand that some people are not engaged in devotional service of the Lord. The preacher then has to take compassion upon such innocent people who do not know how to worship the Lord.

(CC. Madhya 8.44)